

## Foster Compounds

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Seethe thinking rear range hand some pal ace her barium. Nonsense? Not if you have an eye for foster compound words. But if you do have an eye for them, the search becomes a hobby and the hobby can be fun, especially when you spy a dignified sign reading DR. EADS, THERAPIST.

Unlike the ordinary variety, a foster compound is etymologically unrelated to the component words. The distinction is best explained by a genealogical analogy from which the term "foster" is derived.

Many ordinary compounds like handspring, iceberg and horseshoe appeared first as two separate words, with the first noun used as an adjective to modify the second, in preference to correct but awkward combinations like "manual spring," "gelid berg," and "equine shoe." Purists abhorring the lapse in syntax joined the components with hyphens, viz: hand-spring, ice-berg and horse-shoe. In time the combinations matured from dualities or individualities and the hyphens were dropped. Genetically the sequence may be likened to:

hand spring  
hand-spring  
handspring

parents engaged  
parents wedded  
their issue

On the other hand, such words as earnest, parsnip and vaseline were never ear-nest, par-snip and vase-line. The resemblance to ordinary compounds is striking but the parentage is obscure. If "ear" weds "nest" and the child "earnest" lacks the genes of either "ear" or "nest," he is not their issue but a *foster* child.

To complete the definition, the analogy must cover an intermediate class, words like *amenable*, *malefactor* and *coinsure*. In this class, the underscored component is genetically related to the whole word by a common root, but the other component is no kin. A child of but one of two parents is a stepchild, not a foster child. Hence such words are excluded from the class of foster compounds.

Foster compounds are centuries old to enigmatists who used them unendingly in charades, albeit they favored homonymous components. For example:

Two beasts hostile in fact and name,  
 My first was feral, my second tame,  
 The whole made light without a flame.

Some of our most interesting foster compounds were spawned from attempts to anglicize foreign sounds with familiar syllables. From Amerind names for the fish we have alewife and sockeye. From European tongues we have leghorn and pumpernickle. From the birds we have the onomatopoetic bobwhite, killdeer and whippoorwill. Perhaps there should be a term onomatoprosaic to classify claptrap and rapscallion. Similarly potlatch, which is Amerind too.

A few fosters are tandems, combining identical components, like aa, dodo, cancan, tartar and Singsing. Noteworthy also are the dual fosters, divisible in two ways, such as:

cane scent or canes cent  
 car touch or cart ouch  
 gar bled or garb led

Readers who find recreation in oddities of words will enjoy watching for foster compounds. Although many like banana, candid and garden are trivial, one will be startled by bogeyed, clandestine, copepod, damselfish, epicenter, prosecute and seersucker. Over the years the writer has accumulated a list of 460 common primitives (excluding plurals and inflections).

For recreation of another type, the reader may care to match the following three-letter components to form 25 foster compounds:

ace	few	pig
age	fin	rag
ale	fin	rap
ape	hat	ray
ash	hem	red
ate	her	rot
bet	ice	sat
cab	imp	she
can	its	son
cur	led	sty
dig	leg	ten
ear	may	try
ego	not	try
end	ore	wed
end	out	wet
end	pan	win
eon	par	yea

Then, with more diversity as well as diversion, match the following components

to form 20 foster compounds of seven or eight letters each:

ace	does	ice	pan
acre	evil	kin	ram
all	gam	male	real
bled	god	mass	rest
can	goes	mode	see
come	grim	mute	side
corn	heat	now	sty
died	hen	ore	ties
dies	here	owed	wit
din	hers	page	woll

Fin ally this rat her sum mary mess age. Can did inn ovations in mode ration  
liter ally imp rove us men tally and imp art plea sure. Par don the imp lied can dour  
and flag rant hum our the rein.

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### SOLUTIONS

*Introductory sentence.* See the thin king rearrange handsome palace herbarium.

*The dignified sign.* DREADS THE RAPIST

*Charade.* Wolf + Ram = Wolfram

25 foster compounds.

ashore	digits	impend	parsonage	shewed
betray	endear	legend	pigeon	tenace
cabled	finale	mayhem	ragout	wether
canape	forego	notice	rotate	wintry
curfew	hatred	pantry	satrap	yeasty

20 foster compounds.

allowed	doeskin	malemute	restore
candied	gambled	massacre	seepage
comedies	godevil	modesty	sidereal
cornice	grinace	nowhere	withers
dingoes	heathen	panties	wolfram

*Summary.*

Finally this rather summary message. Candid innovations in inoderation  
literally improve us mentally and impart pleasure. Pardon the implied candour  
and flagrant humour therein.

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